1:Stanford U. S-4, 5 1956 AF14 Central China AF14

culturists, absorbed most of these people into its operation, and drove the remnants higher and higher into the hills. The characteristically Chinese agriculture was intensive, that is, it uses large quantities of human labor in irrigating, fertilizing, and cultivating land for maximum yields. Its units of socio-economic organization is the village, composed of those families which cultivate the land within easy walking distance of its center. It was in the villages of rural China, spread over a vast area to exploit the land through a common technology, that the characteristic way of life developed. It is his family's village which is "home" to Chinese of all classes, no matter how far he may wander or how Westernized his life may have become. There are ties with his own family's past, symbolized by the ancestral temple and the family or clan burial ground. There are the other families with which his own has built an enduring network of reciprocal favors and obligations. It is in the farming villages that Communist Party workers now seek to bring about fundamental changes in the way of life and to break up the old complex of family and local loyalties.

What are the common patterns of village life from the plains of Honan to the delta of the Pearl River? We shall sketch these before discussing variations represented by urban life.

A. Village Life

First of all, life in the farming village is meager. In Honan in 1932 there was about one-half an acre of cultivated land per person; in the richer, semi-tropical province of Kwangtung there was one-fifth of an

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acre for each person.[1] Farm families save everything; fecal matter and refuse go into a pit, which also serves to feed the family pig, and at the time of spring fertilizing the material from the pit is mixed with topsoil and spread on the fields. Grass and grainstalks are carefully husbanded to be used as fuel for cooking and, rarely, for heating the house. Cloth is scarce and clothing is worn until it falls apart; after that the rags are used to make the soles of cloth shoes. The shortage of wood for all purposes has long been acute, and farm buildings are made of pounded earth, mud bricks and, in the rice region, of bamboo lathe and mud plaster. Floors are of earth, and only the dwellings of the wealthier farmers have glass windows. The dominant fact of life in the Chinese countryside is poverty. This has grown steadily worse during the last hundred years as factory-made goods destroyed village handicrafts, usury and tenancy increased, wars and ineffectual governments brought disruption and oppression, and overpopulation lowered the standard of living. "The most bankrupt countryside in Asia is the Chinese. The worst crisis of over-population China has yet had to face has been accompanied by a breakdown of traditional ideas and traditional authority so complete as to lead to a state of near anarchy."[2]

The characteristic way of life of the peasants has

1. George B. Cressey, Asia's Lands and Peoples, New York, 1944, p. 87. Cressey cites C. C. Chang "An Estimate of China's Land and Crops," Nanking, 1932; Cressey, p. 88: "...an average farm family of 6.2 persons must obtain its entire livelihood from a farm of 4.18 acres of which but 3.76 acres are actually in crops."

2. Maurice Zinkin, Asia and the West, London, 1951, p. 111.

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been slowly disintegrating under manifold pressures. In prosperous periods in the past a delicate balance of human and economic factors fostered a crowded, conformist, but on the whole, harmonious village life. Recent decades have seen the old harmony replaced by tension and a predatory struggle for survival. And, despite the isolation of most villages, ideas and ideals from the West have slowly undermined the authority of the older mores and customary laws.

Despite all the fissures that have developed, it is well to remember that peasant life everywhere has a tremendous inertia, that it is incredibly resistant to all the forces of change. Thus, much of the sweeping change that occurred in city life under comparable pressures did not occur in the peasant villages.

The main economic and social unit of the village is the family, and a special study is devoted to that subject. Here we shall sketch the rhythm of village life and something of its annual cycle of activity.

The New Year holiday, for the people of China the first fifteen days of the year, is the main period of leisure for the villagers. Food is prepared in advance, and even the women may rest from their cooking during the first five days of the holiday. The town is decorated with nien-hua (New Year's pictures) and ch'un-lien (paired New Year's Day mottoes). Visiting friends and relatives, gambling, eating the best food of the year, wearing the best clothes, and indulging the children make this the most festive period of the year. For many families it is the only time in the year when they can afford to eat meat dishes. The

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and city dwellers kept their ties with their native villages, returned there whenever possible, and many saw commercial activity in the town only as means of the acquisition of sufficient wealth to buy farming land upon their return to the village. The town population, then, is mostly made up of artisans and peasants, plus a small number of landlords, retired officials, county functionaries, and established merchant families. The county seats (hsien capitals) were the centers for tax collection and administration of the surrounding farm-villages and also served as market towns where the peasant might sell his crop and purchase the manufactured goods he could not produce.

Town life for the average artisan was as meager as that of his relatives in the village. Long hours, hard work, low pay, few holidays were the lot of most, and living conditions were generally poorer and more crowded than those in the villages. Proprietors of many shops required their employees to live on the premises, so that they seldom visited their families. The diet of the town dweller was as poor as that of the poor farmer -- mostly cereals, vegetables, and some condiments, and meat and fruit on holidays only. Brief holidays were allowed at the New Year, the Ch'ing-ming festival, the mid-Autumn festival, and the Dragon Boat festival. On these occasions, townspeople usually tried to return to their villages; if this was impossible they enjoyed such delicacies as they could afford and strolled the streets, perhaps visiting friends and attending seasonal fairs and theaters.

Life in the towns was, then, closely linked with village life. But in the provincial capitals, such as

Table 5. The Coastal Shipping Routes of Central-South China */

NAME	ROUTES	DISTANCE
Canton--Chan-chiang Line	Canton--Shui-tung--Chan-chiang	406 Km. (254m.)
Canton--Hai-k'ou Line	Canton--Hai-k'ou	435 Km. (272m.)
Canton--Hai-k'ou--Pei hai Line	Canton--Hai-k'ou--Pei-hai	643 Km. (402m.)
Canton--Yü-lin Line	Canton--Chan-chiang--Yü-lin	
Canton--Chan-chiang--Pei hai Line	Canton-Chiang-men--Chan-chiang Pei-hai	
Canton--Chan-chiang--Shih tao Line	Canton--Chan-chiang--Shih-tao	
Chan-chiang--Pei hai--Tung-hsing Line	Chan-chiang--Pei-hai--Tung-hsing	
Canton--Shan-wei Line	Canton--Ta-ch'an--Shan-wei	
Canton--Swatow Line	Canton--Shan--wei--Swatow	320 Km. (200m.)
Amoy-Swatow Line	Amoy--Swatow	200 Km. (125m.)
	Total	2,004 Km. (1,253mi.

*/ Fei-ch'ü T'i Hang-yün Chiao-t'ung [Navigation in the Communist Area] , Part II, The Sixth Section, Central Committee, Nationalist Party, Taipei, 1953, pp. 2-3.

1:Stanford U. S-4, 5 1956 AF14 Central China AF14

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